

Analysis of Budgetary Accounting Accountability to Improve the Quality of Financial Reports

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Abstract

Accountability in budget management is critical to enhancing the integrity of financial statements at private colleges. The purpose of this research is to examine budget accounting responsibility and how it might enhance the integrity of financial statements by utilising an integrated Accounting Information System (AIS). A qualitative case study technique was used in the research methodologies. Data were gathered through interviews, and document analysis. The findings revealed that effective budget accountability has a vital role in boosting the openness of budget management, resulting in more accurate, relevant, and timely financial reporting. This study recommends that the Islamic University in Baubau City, a private university, improve budget management by implementing an integrated accounting information system to improve accountability and financial statement quality, as well as strengthen public trust in the institution

INTRODUCTION

Private universities in Indonesia face significant challenges in producing accurate and transparent financial reports (Bagus Setiawan & Shaleh, 2023). Despite various efforts to improve the quality of financial management, many institutions still struggle to ensure that projected budgets align with actual expenditures and to prepare financial statements that truly reflect their financial condition (Sahusilawane, 2017). Common issues include data entry errors, delays in report preparation, and discrepancies between estimated and actual expenses. These problems lead to inaccuracies in financial statements that can damage the reputation of universities in the eyes of stakeholders such as the government, students, and the public (Liu, 2022).

Accountability in budget management can help address these challenges. Islamic universities, as one type of private higher education institution in Baubau City, can enhance budgetary accounting accountability by ensuring that every fund received and managed can be transparently accounted for. The implementation of an integrated accounting information system enables real-time budget tracking and monitoring, which can reduce errors and delays in financial reporting. Furthermore, an accountable system allows for more effective budget management, thereby improving the overall quality of financial statements by making them more accurate, timely, and reliable (Kusmaeni & Syahrenny, 2024).

Accountability in budget management is essential to ensure transparency and the effective use of resources in the public sector, including private universities. As educational organizations that manage public funds and student tuition fees, private universities carry a significant obligation to provide accurate and transparent financial reports (Murti & Mulyani, 2022). Transparent and accurate financial statements are a key indicator of successful budget management, which in turn supports better managerial decision-making. However, despite accountability being a primary

objective in budget management, many private universities still struggle to develop budgets that effectively meet operational needs. Preliminary findings indicate that numerous institutions face major challenges in budget management, including data entry errors, reporting delays, and a lack of integration between budget data and financial statements (Asoka & Romanda, 2023). Contributing factors include limited human resources, inadequate training, and continued reliance on manual processes. Discrepancies between planned budgets and actual expenditures can undermine institutional credibility and reduce the quality of financial reports (Marlina et al., 2020).

Accounting information systems (AIS) play an increasingly important role in improving the accuracy of financial statements (Kimani, 2024). These systems not only speed up data entry and reduce human error but also enhance efficiency and accuracy in financial reporting. Therefore, efficient budget management supported by budgetary accountability and integrated AIS is crucial to producing high-quality financial reports (Saddam Catea Hashim, 2024).

Accountability theory underscores the necessity of being answerable for decisions, actions, and the use of resources to relevant stakeholders. In the context of private universities, budgetary accountability involves not only the preparation of accurate financial statements but also ensuring that established budgets align with expected operational demands. According to (Thanasas, 2024), accountability is a key component in fostering transparency and trust within public organizations, particularly universities. Similarly, (Suzan & Mutiah, 2024) emphasize that accountability requires the transparent and responsible disclosure of information regarding the use of funds.

Accounting information systems play a critical role in budgetary accounting by promoting accountability. An integrated AIS can help universities prepare financial statements more quickly and accurately while ensuring that budget data and financial reports are well-connected (Mardiasmo, 2018). The use of computer-based accounting systems can improve the quality of financial reporting by providing more timely and reliable information (Siinta & Darutama, 2023).

Previous studies have shown that strong budgetary accountability can enhance financial management transparency, ultimately leading to higher-quality financial reporting. Milenia et al. (2024) found that the implementation of integrated accounting information systems results in faster and more accurate financial reporting. Furthermore, (Kahar et al., 2023) argue that the adoption of efficient information systems in budget management can improve decision-making efficiency and effectiveness while reducing financial management costs (Suhaimi Nahar & Yaacob, 2011).

Despite the proven effectiveness of accounting information systems, many private universities continue to face challenges in their implementation. Research by (Pradnyana & Dharmadiaksa, 2018) shows that user involvement in training and knowledge of accounting systems significantly affect system performance. This indicates that beyond technological adoption, developing human resource capacity is critical for the successful implementation of AIS (Suardikha, 2018).

This study is unique in examining how budgetary accounting accountability, supported by integrated accounting information systems, can enhance the accuracy of financial reporting in private universities. The primary aim of this research is to investigate the factors influencing accountability in budget management and to analyze how integrated AIS implementation can address the challenges faced by private institutions in preparing financial statements. Unlike previous studies, this research combines an in-depth analysis of budget management with the perspective of accountability, which has been underexplored in the context of private higher education (Pituring Sih et al., 2020).

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of budgetary accounting in improving the accuracy of financial reporting in private universities. Specifically, it seeks to identify the fundamental factors affecting budget management and to examine how the implementation of integrated accounting information systems can enhance transparency, efficiency, and the accuracy of financial reports (Prabowo et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, most prior studies have focused primarily on the procedural aspects of financial accountability and have not comprehensively integrated the application of accounting information systems in the context of private universities, particularly those in regional areas. This research offers a new contribution by exploring how the integration of budgetary accountability and accounting information systems can improve financial reporting quality, thereby broadening the understanding of the critical role of technology in promoting transparency and accuracy in financial reporting within the education sector.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the phenomena of budget management accountability and the quality of financial reporting at an Islamic University. The choice of this approach is driven by the primary aim of gaining a comprehensive understanding of budgeting practices and the use of an Accounting Information System (AIS) in the context of a private higher education institution. The case study design allows the researcher to trace the internal dynamics of the institution in greater detail, aligning with the characteristics and complexity of the organization under investigation.

The research targets all employees involved in the processes of budget management and financial reporting at the Islamic University, located in Baubau City, Southeast Sulawesi Province. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering the informants' experience and relevance to the issues studied. The informants consist of ten individuals holding strategic positions, namely (SB) Vice Rector for Finance, (HS) Head of the Finance Bureau, (LH) Head of the Internal Audit Unit, (SH) Head of the Accounting Division, (DM) Head of the Budget Division, (AL) Head of Administration and Taxation, (AM) Treasurer of Expenditures, (IN) Head of Student Services, (RA) Budget Staff, and (AD) Accounting Staff. These ten informants are considered representative for providing in-depth information on budget accountability practices and the implementation of the AIS within the university.

Data were collected using two primary techniques: in-depth interviews and document analysis. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, using key questions that allowed for broad exploration of the informants' responses. The interviews focused on the informants' experiences and perspectives regarding budget management accountability, challenges in financial reporting, and the utilization of the AIS at the university. Meanwhile, document analysis was carried out on financial reports, budget management records, and internal policies

related to transparency and accountability. This document analysis served as a triangulation tool to enhance the validity of the findings.

The research model integrates the concepts of budget accountability theory and accounting information system theory, focusing on how the implementation of these two concepts influences the quality of financial reporting in private higher education institutions. Within this framework, budget management accountability and AIS implementation are positioned as independent variables, while financial reporting quality is treated as the dependent variable. The quality of financial reporting in this study is measured using four key indicators: accuracy, relevance, timeliness, and transparency.

The data analysis technique applied is thematic analysis. The process began with coding the interview and document data to identify relevant themes, such as accountability practices, budget management challenges, system effectiveness, and financial reporting quality. These themes were then categorized based on their relationship to the research variables, such as the system's impact on accountability, issues in report preparation, and the effect of budget management on the reliability of financial information. Finally, the data were interpreted by linking the findings within each category to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between budget accountability, the accounting information system, and the quality of financial reporting in the context of private higher education institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Subheadings Level 2

This study involved ten key informants, namely: the Vice Rector for Finance (initials SB), the Head of the Financial Administration Bureau (HS), the Head of the Internal Audit Unit (LH), the Head of the Accounting Division (AH), the Head of the Budget Division (DM), the Head of Administration and Taxation (AL), the Treasurer of Expenditures (AM), the Head of Student Services (IN), the Budget Staff (RA), and the Accounting Staff (AD). Each informant plays an important role in budget management and financial reporting at the Islamic University and provides unique insights into the issues and challenges of budget management. Based on interviews with these informants, the study successfully addressed the research question, namely how accountability in budget management can enhance the quality of financial reporting at the Islamic University in Baubau City.

According to the Vice Rector for Finance, the implementation of an integrated accounting information system and the strengthening of budget management accountability play a crucial role in producing high-quality financial reports. Technology is essential for improving efficiency, transparency, and accuracy in financial reporting within the university setting.

At the Islamic University, one of the most challenging tasks in budget management is ensuring that all planned budgets can be properly realized. There are times when discrepancies arise between the projected budget and actual needs in the field, creating imbalances in fund allocation. In addition, limited human resources and manual procedures make it difficult to

produce timely and accurate reports. The Vice Rector further stated:

“We will continue to improve the existing system so that budget management can be carried out transparently and effectively. In addition, we prioritize training for finance staff and strict oversight. We also ensure that every aspect of the financial reports is reviewed and audited regularly, so the information we present to stakeholders is truly reliable.”

(Interview with SB, Vice Rector for Finance, Islamic University)

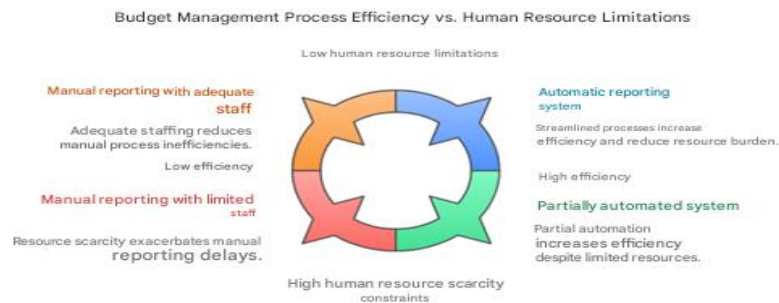


Figure 1; Efficiency of Budget Management Processes vs. Human Resource Limitations

Based on an interview with the Head of the Financial Administration Bureau, he stated:

“Accountability in budget management can improve the quality of financial reports, especially when addressing the challenges of budget management and financial reporting in private universities. One of the biggest problems we face is the delay in preparing financial reports due to the manual processes that are still in use. The system we currently use is not yet well integrated. Approved budget data often does not synchronize with the financial reports we produce. As a result, we have to repeatedly correct and revise the reports, which is very time-consuming. In addition, discrepancies often occur between the planned budget and the actual use of funds. We sometimes find it difficult to match the designed budget with actual expenditures.”

(Interview with HS, Head of the Financial Administration Bureau, Islamic University).



Figure 2: Enhancing Accountability in Budget Management

This study examines how accountability in budget management can improve the quality of financial reporting at Islamic universities. Based on interviews with informants, the most common issues in budget management are discrepancies between planned and actual budgets, as well as delays in the preparation of financial reports. These problems are caused by a system that is not yet integrated and still relies on manual procedures. Therefore, the research problem can

be addressed by identifying that budget management not connected to an effective information system is a major factor limiting the quality of financial reports. Consequently, implementing an integrated accounting information system can help enhance transparency, accuracy, and efficiency in budget preparation and financial reporting.

An interview with LH, Head of the Internal Audit Unit, revealed:

“This situation causes reports to fail in reflecting the actual financial condition, which certainly has a negative impact on stakeholders.” He stated that using separate accounting information systems for budgeting and financial reporting presents a significant challenge. “Data input processes are still done manually and are not fully digitized. This often results in input errors and delays in preparing financial reports,” LH said. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of more transparent budget management: “If the system is not well-integrated, it becomes difficult for us to provide accurate and accountable information to external parties such as auditors or the Central Leadership Council of Muhammadiyah’s Higher Education Board.” LH added that better budget management requires a system that connects various units and faculties and consolidates data on a single, easily accessible platform (Interview with LH, Head of Internal Audit Unit).

Based on interviews with AH, Head of the Accounting Department, it was found that inaccuracies in financial reporting often affect the transparency of financial management at the study program level. “As budget accounting managers, we sometimes feel unable to access financial data directly. This makes it difficult for us to schedule activities appropriately,” AH said. According to him, improved budget management is necessary, especially in terms of transparency in fund usage. “If financial records are fully connected, we can trace expenditures and know exactly how much funds are available for future activities” (Interview with AH).

The findings of this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with four informants holding key positions in budget management within the organization. The interviews revealed that discrepancies and delays in financial reporting are often caused by fragmented systems, data input errors, and insufficient training for budget management professionals. This study supports previous research (Milenia et al., 2024), which stated that the use of digitized accounting information systems can enhance the efficiency and quality of financial reporting by minimizing input errors and accelerating the report preparation process.

An interview with DM, Head of the Budget Department, stated:

“Budget management still faces several challenges that can affect the accuracy of financial reports. One of the most common issues is that financial reports are not prepared on time. Many universities struggle to submit reports promptly because the process has not yet utilized a Budget Information System, and there are discrepancies between planned budgets and actual expenditures” (Interview with DM).

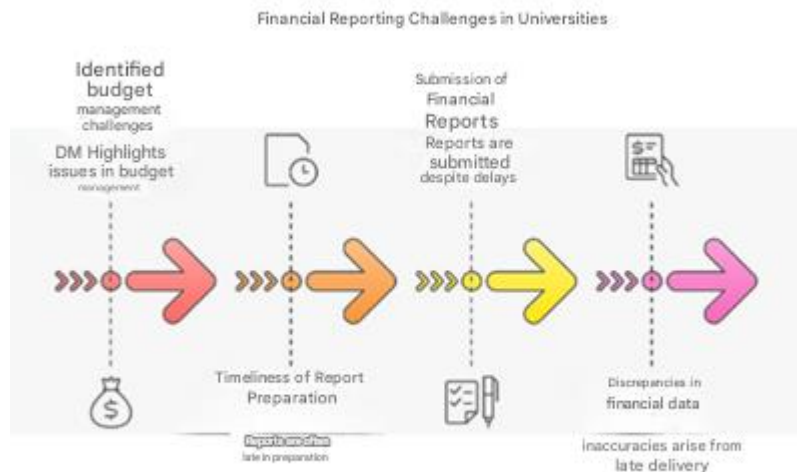


Figure 3: Challenges in Financial Reporting in Higher Education

Based on the findings, accountability in budget management is strongly associated with the quality of financial reporting. Inefficient and non-transparent budget management systems often result in inaccurate financial reports, which can hinder internal decision-making and undermine external trust. Private universities can enhance the transparency and accuracy of their financial reporting by developing an integrated accounting information system, thereby improving accountability in budget management. Digitized accounting information systems provide real-time access to financial data while reducing errors caused by manual management.

An interview with the Head of Administration and Taxation (AL) revealed:

“One of the greatest challenges in administration is managing funds allocated across various study programs and institutions. This leads to inefficient budget monitoring and frequent discrepancies between projected budgets and actual expenditures. Moreover, manual procedures for budget data input increase the risk of errors, and reporting delays are a recurring problem,” AL stated.

The interview with the Head of Expenditure Treasury (AM) indicated that implementing an integrated accounting information system would result in more effective and accurate budget management. The main issues are manual data handling and budget discrepancies, which lead to errors in financial reporting. Therefore, implementing a more efficient accounting information system, accompanied by financial staff training, is a crucial step toward improving accountability and the quality of financial reports in private universities (Interview with AM, Head of Expenditure Treasury).

In an interview with the Head of Student Services (IN), several issues regarding budget management and the accounting information system at private universities were identified. IN, who oversees student services and administration, provided insights into the challenges and potential solutions related to budget management and financial reporting.

According to IN, one of the challenges faced is the lack of synchronization between budget management for student activities and the systems used by administration. “We often struggle to monitor expenditures in accordance with approved budgets. The system we use is not fully integrated, which hinders our ability to provide timely services to students. Additionally, delays in the expenditure process affect financial services and reporting,” IN explained.

Furthermore, staff from the Budget Department (RA) noted that one challenge faced by their office is the limited capacity of the system to manage financial data in real-time. “We often experience difficulties in monitoring budgets directly. Because the data provided by the system is not integrated, the budget monitoring process becomes inefficient. This also affects the speed and accuracy of financial report preparation,” RA stated. They also mentioned that services related to student fees and research fund management are frequently disrupted due to input errors when information is not updated automatically.

In-depth interviews with informant AD, an Accounting Staff member, identified that one of the main obstacles to preparing accurate financial reports is the limited access to real-time financial data. Transaction recording is still largely done manually, and financial data is often received only after activities have taken place. This results in reporting delays and increases the risk of data entry errors. Furthermore, AD highlighted that the accounting information system in use is not fully integrated across the budgeting, finance, and other work units. This lack of system connectivity leads to redundant work and requires manual verification processes between units. AD explained that system integration is necessary so that accounting staff can directly monitor and adjust financial reports based on automatically updated data. AD also emphasized the importance of transparency in financial management, suggesting that the accounting information system should not only record transactions but also provide automatic notifications when discrepancies arise between the budget and actual fund usage.

DISCUSSION

Subheading Level 2

The findings of this study align with previous definitions of accountability and accounting information systems. According to Suhaimi Nahar & Yaacob (2011), accountability is the need to provide clear and honest explanations regarding the use of funds, which can be achieved through a transparent and structured system. This study also reinforces the findings of Milenia et al. (2024), which state that implementing an integrated accounting information system can improve the accuracy and timeliness of financial reporting. Computerized systems help ensure that financial reports are not only accurate but also prepared on time, which is crucial for decision-making based on valid and reliable data.

Based on these findings, this study proposes a new version of accountability theory that incorporates the integration of accounting information systems as a significant contributor to improving financial report quality. This theoretical update introduces a new dimension: in addition to the need for transparency in budget management, an integrated and efficient system is also an essential element in enhancing accountability and the quality of financial reports. Therefore, existing concepts of accountability should be updated to include the use of technology in financial management as part of a more modern, technology-based governance framework.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine the role of budgetary accounting accountability in improving the quality of financial reporting in private universities, with a case study at an Islamic University. The findings indicate that accountability in budget management plays a central role in ensuring that fund allocation and usage align with the institution's objectives. The implementation of an integrated accounting information system (AIS) contributes significantly to enhancing budget accountability and transparency, which in turn improves the quality of financial reports. Financial reports become more accurate, timely, and reliable for all stakeholders. The study also reveals that factors such as human resource capacity and technological infrastructure are key determinants of successful AIS implementation.

However, this study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the research scope is limited to a single institution in a specific region, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Second, the qualitative approach, based on in-depth interviews, may allow for perspective bias from the informants. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ a quantitative approach or a mixed-method design involving a larger number of institutions and diverse regions. Additionally, other factors beyond AIS and accountability—such as organizational culture, institutional governance, and the influence of external regulations—should be explored to gain a more comprehensive understanding of financial reporting quality in private universities in Indonesia.

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